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ABSTRACT

This document presents the second of five newsletters on sex education for parents. The newsletters were designed to help parents increase their ability to communicate with their adolescents about sexual issues. They explore the origins of the parents' feelings about sex; teach the importance of a healthy self-concept and how to build it in the adolescent; unravel the physical, social, and emotional mysteries of adolescence; and develop some skills that will help parents talk about sex with their adolescents. The specific goals of this newsletter on self-esteem are to help parents: (1) be able to define self-esteem and understand the relationship between a person's view of himself/herself and his or her behavior; (2) understand the impact of family and society on the development of self-esteem; (3) know the four conditions necessary for positive self-esteem; (4) be able to identify some ways to create positive self-esteem in one's child; and (5) understand the importance of liking oneself as a prerequisite to helping others like themselves. The newsletter is presented in workbook format with spaces provided for parents to write answers to questions and exercises. It concludes with a reference list and a short list of suggested readings for parents. (NB)

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Growing Pains

SEX EDUCATION FOR PARENTS

A Newsletter Series

by

The University of Connecticut
Cooperative Extension Service

ED327797

Letter I	Sexuality
Letter II	SELF-ESTEEM
Letter III	Puberty/Adolescence
Letter IV	Communication and Negotiation
Letter V	Talking About Sex

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Letter II
Self-Esteem

At the end of this letter you should:

- *be able to define self-esteem and understand the relationship between a person's view of himself/herself and his or her behavior.*
- *understand the impact of family and society on the development of self-esteem.*
- *know the four conditions necessary for positive self-esteem.*
- *be able to identify some ways to create a positive self-esteem in your child.*
- *understand the importance of liking oneself as a prerequisite to helping others like themselves.*

WHO ARE YOU?

You are a very special person. There is only one of you in the world. Your experiences — what has happened to you from birth to now, and your heredity have worked together to make you the person that you are. Getting to know who you are and what makes you tick are important steps in becoming the person you want to be.

As you grew up you experienced feelings, adopted attitudes and dealt with relationships. All of this affected who you are and what you think of yourself. They are the basis for your likes, dislikes, loves, hates, and fears.

Initial work on this project was conducted by Joan Polulech, M.S.W., in 1983 as part of a Pregnancy Prevention Program which was Funded by the Office of Adolescent Pregnancy Programs, DHHS.

NAME THREE THINGS THAT YOU:

LIKE	DISLIKE	LOVE	HATE	FEAR

Take one of the items you listed under each of the above categories and try to decide what in your childhood, adolescence, or adult life contributed to what you like, dislike, love, hate and fear.

I like_____ because_____

I dislike_____ because_____

I love_____ because_____

I hate_____ because_____

I fear_____ because_____

As a result of this exercise:

I think:_____

I feel:_____

I learned:_____

I want to change:_____

I don't want to change:_____

YOUR SELF-ESTEEM

Your self-esteem reflects how you see yourself as a human being, an assessment of your own worth. It indicates the extent to which you believe yourself to be a lovable and capable person. Your esteem is continually developing and changing and is affected by your daily interaction with others.

Your self-esteem whether it is low or high will affect the way you interact with other people. What you think and feel about yourself is sometimes determined by what others have said about you or what they have done to and with you.

The following exercise may help you better understand what we are talking about. Many times without realizing it we let others' opinions determine how and what we think and feel about ourselves.

Directions: In column 1, write Your opinion of yourself in relation to the following subjects. In column 2 describe or quote two comments made about you by others.

YOUR:	YOUR OPINION OF YOURSELF	COMMENTS BY FATHER, MOTHER, OTHER
1. Intelligence		
2. Appearance:		
3. Personality:		
4. Being or becoming successful:		
5. Having or developing talents:		
6. Coordination or athletic ability:		
7. Ability to use money:		
8. Self-discipline or inner resources:		
9. Role as male or female:		
10. Role as father, mother, son or daughter:		
11. Body, any specific parts:		

How have these comments or lack of comments affected your opinion of yourself, your self-esteem?

What have you said about or to your adolescent that would affect his/her self-esteem in either a positive or negative way?

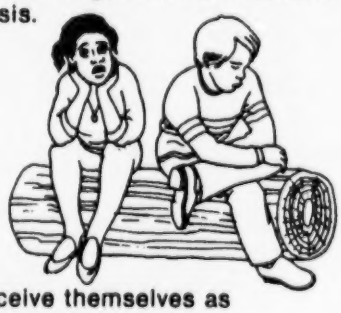
POSITIVE	NEGATIVE

What have you said to or about your spouse (if you are a single parent choose a friend) that would affect his/her self-esteem in either a positive or negative way?

POSITIVE	NEGATIVE

SELF-ESTEEM AND BEHAVIOR

Persons with high self-esteem appear poised and confident. In their social relationships they make friends easier, are less likely than others to be influenced by their peers, and tend to make well-thought-out decisions. They are proud of their accomplishments, assume responsibility, tolerate frustration, approach new challenges with enthusiasm and will be flexible in their approach to crisis.



Persons with low self-esteem perceive themselves as powerless and act accordingly. They tend to take fewer risks to grow, they feel isolated and inadequate, play down their talents, blame others for their own failings. They tend to be easily influenced by others and become easily frustrated and defensive. They are generally less flexible than persons with high-esteem in their approach to crisis. They sometimes cover up these feelings of inadequacy by acting crude, hostile, and assume a know-it-all attitude.

Feeling good about who you are is one of the bases for making responsible decisions about your sexuality. Accepting yourself as unique and worthwhile can give you the strength to act on your own values, even when there is pressure to act another way.

To better understand the connection between a person's self-esteem and behavior, put yourself, for a moment, in the "shoes" of Brenda and Bobby below. Complete the sentences as if you were Bobby or Brenda.

Hi, I'm_____
(your name)

I am a lovable and capable person

I feel _____

_____

I show this in my behavior by _____

_____

Hi, I'm_____
(your name)

I am not a lovable and capable person.

I feel _____

_____

I show this in my behavior by _____

_____

By now you understand the importance of positive self-esteem. It is also important to have a family and a society that supports you in your efforts to grow into a healthy, happy and productive adult. But, **how does one get positive self-esteem?**

Researchers Clemes and Bean have studied that question for years and found that people who have high self-esteem had four characteristics that people who had low self-esteem lacked. They have a Sense of:

1. **Being Connected** — they had an attachment to at least one significant other. This connectiveness could be to an individual, family, group, club, culture, or a heritage.
2. **Being Unique** — they felt and thought of themselves as being special. This special sense helped them believe: "I am an individual with something special; others think so too."
3. **Having Power** — they felt or thought that they could make a difference. They could influence their own life, and bring about change in their environment. They made good decisions.
4. **Models** — they had someone to look up to, who helped them develop meaningful values, goals, ideals and standards.

How can you as a parent help your adolescent develop these four senses?

Sense of Connectiveness:_____

_____

_____

Sense of Uniqueness:_____

_____

Sense of Power:_____

_____

Sense of Models:_____

_____

HELPING CHILDREN DEVELOP HIGH SELF-ESTEEM

Four Senses • High Self-Esteem • I am Lovable and Capable.

If we can provide the opportunity for your adolescent to continue to develop these four senses, this young person will have high self-esteem and will feel accepted, loved and capable. Jim Van Horn of Pennsylvania State University has given some suggestions for developing high self-esteem in little children. This will work for adolescents. You can:

- genuinely accept the adolescent
- be interested and concerned about him/her
- emphasize even the smallest successes
- give sincere affection
- treat fairly each child in the family
- spend uninterrupted time with each adolescent
- do something with the adolescents they want to do
- listen when the adolescent has something to say

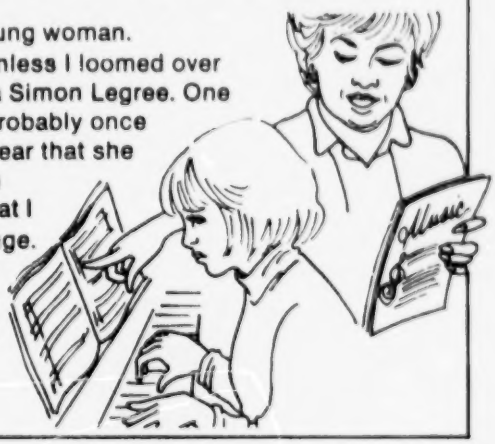
PARENTS BEWARE

You may damage self-esteem by:

- setting standards that are too high
- setting standards that are too low
- subjecting the child to ridicule or sarcasm
- labeling the child with words such as clumsy or thoughtless
- telling the child he or she is a failure for making a mistake
- over protecting
- dominating or neglecting the child.

Often parents feel the reason they do not communicate with their children is that they are not skillful enough. Communication is not only a matter of skill it is also a matter of attitude. When our attitude is one of respect for, love of, and interest in our children and their welfare, that cultivates effective communication. Our children recognize that effort on our part. On the other hand, when we are impatient, hostile, or resentful, it doesn't matter what words we choose or how we try to camouflage our feelings. These attitudes will be felt by our adolescents. Consideration, love and interest plus our ability to admit our mistakes, seems to be fundamental for earning our children's respect.

One mother said: "My daughter is a musically talented young woman. For many years I felt that this talent would not be developed unless I loomed over her at the piano and insistently supervised her practices like a Simon Legree. One day, sometime in her early teens, I realized that my attitude, probably once useful, was visibly affecting our relationship. Torn between a fear that she would not fully develop a God-given talent and the reality of an increasingly strained relationship over that very issue, I did what I had seen my own mother do when faced with a serious challenge. I sequestered myself in my secret place and poured out my soul in prayer, seeking the only wisdom that could help me keep that communication open... Upon arising from my knees, I knew what action I must take."



Because it was just three days before Christmas, I gave to Mary as a personal gift an apron from which I had conspicuously cut the apron strings. There was a tiny pocket on the apron in which I tucked a note, it read: 'Dear Mary, I'm sorry for the conflict I have caused by acting like a federal marshall at the piano. I must have looked foolish there — just you and me and my six-shooters. Forgive me. You are becoming a young woman in your own right. I have only worried that you would not feel as fully confident and fulfilled as a woman if you left your talent unfinished. I love you. Mom'.

"Later that day she sought me out, and in a quiet corner of our home she said: 'Mother, I know you want what is best for me, and I have known that all my life. But if I'm ever going to play the piano well, I'm the one who has to do the practicing, not you.' Then she threw her arms around me and with tears in her eyes she said, 'I've been wondering how to teach you that — and somehow you figured it out on your own'.

A few years later Mary said, 'your willingness to say I'm sorry, I've made a mistake, please forgive me' gave me a sense of self-worth, because it said I was worthy enough for a parental apology, and that I can be right."

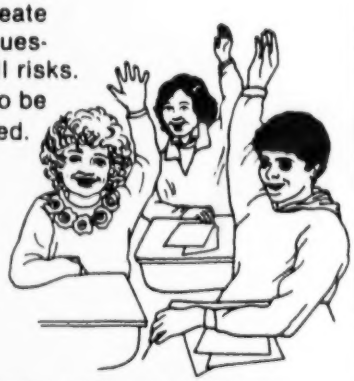
Where is your secret place, where do you gain your wisdom, and what problem solving methods are you passing on to your adolescents? Are there things you need to say you are sorry for and/or apologize for? What can you stop or start doing so your adolescents will know that you think they are capable and lovable? Do not list more than three.

STOP	START
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

YOU AND THE COMMUNITY: A PARTNERSHIP

You are not the only person who helps develop self-esteem in your children. Caregivers such as teachers, administrators, clergy and other youth leaders can augment the home environment by creating situations in a group and school environment where adolescents can risk.

Teachers who allow students to be actively involved in their own learning, with guidelines, help provide the adolescent with a sense of power. They create an atmosphere where risk taking is possible. Raising a hand to answer questions, asking for extra help, or even questioning what a teacher says are all risks. To you these activities, except for questioning the teacher, may not seem to be much of a risk. However, for some adolescents these are very big risks indeed. Example:



the adolescent who raises his/her hand to ask a question takes a risk of being ridiculed or laughed at by his peers or even by the teacher. Adolescents who have high self-esteem will risk asking the questions because they believe they have a right to know the answer.

FINAL NOTE: We can't give what we don't have. As parents and other caregivers we have to accept ourselves as unique, competent human beings. We must have positive self-esteem ourselves. This involves acknowledging what we see as the positive aspects of ourselves and working on what we think we should change. We gain self-esteem through positive feedback from others, from education and from practice.

LET'S SUMMARIZE:

Four conditions necessary for high self-esteem are:
1. Connectiveness
2. Uniqueness
3. Power
4. Models

Understanding and accepting ourselves helps us understand and accept others

Our self-esteem is formed through interaction with other people.

Self-esteem is how I feel about myself. Am I lovable and capable or not lovable and capable.

The family is the most important influence on one's self-esteem.

How we feel about ourselves determines what we think we are able to do and that determines what we will try.

ADD TO YOUR CONTRACT

What three things are you going to do, that you are not doing now, that will improve your adolescents' self-esteem?

What two things are you going to stop doing that if you continued, will lower your adolescents' self-esteem?

SUGGESTED READINGS:

A number of books and pamphlets are available in libraries and bookstores on the topics of self-esteem. We recommend:

The Adolescent and Self-Esteem by Janet Kezziar and Judy Hagedors.

Enhancing Self-Esteem by James Van Horn, Extension Specialist, University of Pennsylvania

Our Children's Self-Esteem: Thoughts for Parents and Teachers, by Mary Nelson. Write to: Network Publications, 1700 Mission Street, Suite 203, P.O. Box 8566,Santa Cruz, CA 95061.

Your Child's Self-Esteem, by Dorothy Corkelle Briggs.

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